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COMEDIA SERIES

THE
SPELL OF THE PAST

(A FANTASY)

— BY —

JOHN TOWER and AUGUST DE CRÉZOLLE



“Comedia” 2920 Cottage Grove Ave.
Chicago

PRICE 25 CENTS NET

THE SPELL OF THE PAST

A FANTASY

(BASED ON AN OLD FRENCH PLAY)

— BY —

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

RICHARD PRINDLE, *an author.*

LOUISE PRINDLE, *his wife.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

LORD ROBERT ESSEX, *favorite of Queen Elizabeth.*

MARQUIS OF WINCHESTER, *first treasury administrator.*

TOM HATHAWAY, *brother of Ann.*

LORD EGLAMOUR.

LORD BRISK.

LORD FASTIDIOUS.

SIR HARRINGTON, *called Mr. Critic, editor of the Mercury.*

SIR DOGBERRY, *merchant.*

HENSLOWE, *manager of the Blackfriars theatre.*

OLIVIO.

QUEEN ELIZABETH.

ANN, *wife of Shakespeare.*

JUDITH, *daughter of Shakespeare.*

SUSANNA,

*Comedians, guardsmen, ambassador, ushers, constables, landlord,
waiters, trades-people, courtiers, etc.*

PROLOGUE *Room in the Temple, London.*

ACT I. *Greenroom of Blackfriars theatre, London.*

ACT II. *Entrance to Blackfriars theatre.*

ACT III. *Study of Marquis of Winchester, Hampton Court.*

ACT IV. *Tom Hathaways house, at Stratford.*

ACT V. *Mansion-house of Count Essex, London.*

ACT VI. *Library of Queen Elizabeth.*

EPILOGUE *Same scene as in PROLOGUE.*

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PROLOGUE.

ACTION Takes place in England.

Room in the Temple, London. A door at left leads to private apartments; the door at right opens into a hall. At back, a window shows a patch of violet, all that is left of daylight. The walls have shelves filled with books. There is a grate at left. At center, a plain table sustains a clutter of books, and writing materials. A shaded lamp casts a funnel of light downwards, leaving the remainder of the room in semi-darkness.

RICHARD PRINDLE, a man of forty, sits at the table, writing and meditating. He looks daggers at his work, and crumples discarded sheets into snowballs, which he drops gently on the floor. At length, he leans back, taps absently at the desk with his pen, relights his pipe, and stares at the ceiling.

LOUISE PRINDLE, a charming woman of thirty-five, enters at left. She is dressed for the theatre, and coos indulgently at the abstracted writer.

LOU. Ah, Richard . . . Working after supper again?

RICH. Oh! It's you, Louise? Hum . . . (*He slips back into reverie.*)

LOU. You know what I told you.

RICH. What was it you told me?

LOU. That you would get indigestion. Working after supper does that.

RICH. Humph, I wouldn't be at all surprised if I had a paralytic stroke before this scenario is done.

LOU. Why? What's the matter?

RICH. Everything. I've messed at the whole thing so long that I can't make anything out of it, and neither could a dab hand at riddles. I'm completely baffled.

LOU. O, drop the perplexing writing for a while and go to the theatre with me.

RICH. To the theatre? Not much. I must finish this scenario before I go to bed . . . My! how nice we look . . . Jove! London would have to go to America again to get a better looking lady than you are, Louise. Say, isn't that so?

LOU. Hush, child. You mustn't work after supper, I tell you. It's dangerous. It might lead to . . . (*She pauses to think of some awful consequence.*) . . . insomnia. Richard, can't you go?

RICH. No. I'd like to do anything you ask, but if I go the ghost of this unfinished scenario would accompany me, and that's a fine sort of companion to take on a trip. Besides, when I once get out of this chair, I find it difficult to get back into it. Ah, but I'm in a muddle . . . (*He glares at the manuscript.*) Damn . . .

LOU. Richard . . .

RICH. Yes, Louise, I mean it. Plays are not subjects of prayer. A little Billingsgate helps them along wonderfully.

LOU. But what is the trouble? You were saying this morning that London fairly incited one to make plays.

RICH. That's true, I did. And now, my Characters have all gone on a strike, and tied up my play-mill. I don't know why it is. I've set all my traps but have caught no birds. Every line I write is as dull as a counting-house index.

LOU. Cease writing, then, and look about you.

RICH. (*looking at her.*) All right. I will look about me. My gaze is focused six feet away. I see something superb.

LOU. No, let the memories of this old building we live in lure your imagination, these old walls that have seen many little dramas in the days that are no more.

RICH. These walls are old. Our kitchen ceiling is old. It stays up on trust.

LOU. It seems that you are forgetting how we came to the Temple because it deemed like an evocation from the past.

RICH. Well, the London of the present is a little supercilious of ancient things. She tears down her historic buildings to make room for modern ugliness, she widens the street to suit the quantity of drays, she straightens crooked streets. All this for the sake of expediency.

LOU. Old buildings get unsafe.

RICH. Yes, but the government can spare a fund to protect the ancient landmarks, and I think it is no mere sentimentalism to wish to preserve it?

some of the delightful old things of the past. What do you think about

LOU. I find that the London of the present has a few romantic features.

RICH. You are right, Louise. It is the mixture of present and past that makes us love London. Commerce, industrialism, tradition, and ghosts of other years dominate these few miles along the Thames. We'll make the most of our London as we find her.

LOU. Charm is necessary to the existence of us women. If none exists, we invent it.

(A remote church-bell tolls eight o'clock.)

LOU. We were speaking of romance. There it is, coming to us through the air. Eight o'clock, the magic hour when a practical day is gone and romance begins. Eight o'clock, the magic hour when curtains rise in play-houses, eight o'clock when fellows go forth on romantic calls from East End to Hyde Park. Eight o'clock, when impatient girls listen for the ring of the door-bell.

RICH. Louise, for example.

LOU. Eight o'clock, when Richard sits in his room imagining plays and eight o'clock when I start forth to see a play. Isn't all that charming enough?

RICH. Eight o'clock, when Louise, the most gracious of Londoners, stands defiantly in front of me, in the latest gown, dilating on the oldest subject.

LOU. Richard, I'll be late for the theatre.

RICH. Eight o'clock. The overture is ended, and the bell for the curtain rings, Eight o'clock, the curtain goes up, and Louise is not there.

LOU. It's not strange, with such a nuisance.

RICH. Eight o'clock, the moment of final adjustments of wigs, of last daubs from the rouge-pot, of last love-messages from the stage manager, the moment when rage and despair come out of the bottle together, and the author bolts toward the neighboring bar and drinks whiskey straight. A romantic moment.

LOU. Well, now I must go.

RICH. Well, if you must go, then...go.

LOU. I'll see you after the play, Richard.

RICH. Don't fail me. I expect to read you what I have written. Can you get to the theatre all right?

LOU. Yes. The Peytons are coming for me with their auto.

RICH. What's on the bill?

LOU. Romeo and Juliet.

RICH. I never knew they gave that play, not since its premiere at the Blackfriars several centuries ago. Romeo and Juliet. Look through the window, Louise. There is the site where the Blackfriar stood.

LOU. Just think of it, Richard. And I suppose the Mermaid wasn't far away.

RICH. The Mermaid was several blocks toward the Tower.

LOU. The old Blackfriar theatre. I almost imagine I see it looming out of the fog.

(An auto-horn toots.)

But there are the Peytons, now, with the auto. I must not keep them waiting. Good-by, Richard. After Shakespeare, remember, I'll listen to you.

(The door-bell rings.)

RICH. Shakespeare is an awful competitor.

LOU. Now, I am going, in reality. Goodby.

RICH. Good-by, Louise, until after the play.

(Louise, goes out at right. Richard looks toward the debris of manuscript on the table, shrugs his shoulders, stirs the fire in the grate, lights his pipe, then a little distraught draws a chair near the window and gazes out, gradually yielding to a mood of revery. Twilight deepens and he doesn't move. A hand-organ begins to play in a neighboring street. Richard rouses himself, draws his chair to the table, and begins to write.)

End of the PROLOGUE.

ACT I.

Green-room at BLACKFRIARS theatre, London. Window at right, doors left and rear. Table at right, littered with books, bound in paper.

SCENE I.

Sir DOGBERRY, Sir HARRINGTON, then OLIVIO.

DOG. Hey, boy!... you Olivio... inform the manager of the Blackfriars we would speak with him.

OL. Your names, gentlemen?

HAR. Sir Harrington and Sir Dogberry.

OL. I'll announce you.

HAR. Tell him to make haste... we are men of affairs ...

DOG. Why, so we are ... Say that to Mr. Henslowe ... Men of affairs large affairs.

OL. I'll tell him.

(Exit Olivio)

HAR. That boy's too handsome.

DOG. Aye, so he is ... His good looks line his pockets ... He plays the female roles, and plays them in a fashion most amazing womanly. You'd scarcely call him boy ... His speech is nicely treble, with feminine mutes and stops. ...

HAR. His presence is right delicate.

DOG. He's most delusive ... So softly feminine is he, that 'eyes of amorous fellows sparkle when they see him come.

(Olivio returns.)

HAR. *(to Olivio)* What says the manager?

OL. Nothing ... He's at rehearsal, sir ... Shall I announce you there?

HAR. Of course.

OL. I'll go, then.

DOG. Not at rehearsal ... That's the unluckiest time of all ... Angels protect us! ... A man's inhuman then ... Not at rehearsal ... A melancholy time to talk ... Now, boy, if you could give our message.

HAR. I'm willing.

OL. I'll do it, gentlemen.

HAR. But first a question. Does your troupe give Marlowe's play next Saturday?

OL. Aye ... "The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew."

DOG. A fearsome title.

OL. It treats of fearsome affairs.

HAR. It's bruited in the streets that the queen expects to attend. Is that her purpose?

OL. We're so informed.

DOG. Now, fancy that ... the queen.

HAR. Bespeak two seats of Henslowe, good ones, mind, for Sir Harrington, critic of the Mercury. For Saturday ... You know of me, no doubt.

OL. O, yes. Your articles are famous for their style ... I trust you see the plays you criticise.

HAR. O, often.

OL. You jolly well impale poor strolling players and starved dramatists.

HAR. They mostly need it.

OL. You slay by means of epigrams.

HAR. I'm fond of massacres. I count on "St. Bartholomew."

OL. Henslowe should give you a seat in the tumbrel.

DOG. Be tender to the critic.

OL. O, we poor actor folk are bland enough to critics.

DOG. Well, save us out some seats for the "Massacre." Here's my money. *(He hands him coin.)* I'm Sir Dogberry, the hosier in Lombard, near York Arms.

OL. Thank you. I'll arrange.

DOG. *(to Olivio)* If you do play, I like the thing still more. Dost play, Olivio.

OL. Aye.

DOG. Velvet-eyes, I think I'll like that play.

HAR. *(to Olivio)* Dogberry's cracked. His head is packed with paltry stuffing ... Velvet-eyes.

DOG. You've never seen Olivio in ladies' finery.

HAR. Tut! The whole affair's an affectation. Masculine virtues show through feminine faults, and manly legs in female frocks. Pathetic sight.

DOG. There's truth, now. Lads without their beards make likely dames, but whiskers mean disaster. The other eve Queen Catherine forgot to shave. The management was most perplexed.

HAR. I've writ an article about those whiskers.

DOG. We laughed the tragedy into comedy.

HAR. A most depressing incident.

DOG. It entertained us all.

HAR. Well, I shall come to see Olivio.

DOG. You'll see him beat the ladies at coquetry, with boyish, excuse me, girlish graces.

OL. O, I'm no marvel, Sir Dogberry.

HAR. (*to Olivio*) Dogberry's compliments will get him a seat in the best location. You'll read my compliments in the Mercury ... after the performance.

OL. I'll read them not. And now, good sirs, I'll go, else I shall miss my cue. I'll get your seats at the play.

(*Exit Olivio.*)

SCENE II.

Sir DOGBERRY, Sir HARRINGTON.

HAR. Pah! A man in a woman's role.

DOG. The stage is not fit for women.

HAR. Well, is it fit for anyone?

DOG. It helps to pass the time.

HAR. If I could see a woman in the role of man 'twould please me more.

DOG. Aye, that would be a sight, old pepper-box.

HAR. A gallant sight, old sugar-bowl.

DOG. Well, Olivio is a pleasant lad of parts.

HAR. He's a lad with a nice complexion and manners rather pert.

DOG. Your profession, Mr. Critic, has roughed you up with enmity for all.

HAR. Your character's rather dulcet, Mr. Public.

DOG. Nothing you praise.

HAR. Nothing you hate save the genuine.

DOG. Your opinions fall like December sleet.

HAR. You have no opinions, Mr. Public.

DOG. I'm built of them. You're built of dogma.

HAR. You do not have to regulate the public taste like me. You do not have to say yea and nay like an executioner, and be impassive when heads fall. You are not a critic.

DOG. Verily, thou hangman masterful, but I am the public.

HAR. Yes, London calls you that.

DOG. Don't flatter yourself. Your business is a business just like mine. You sell phrases by the yard, as I sell hosiery, ribbons, yarn, and gay necessities for the body of man and maid. God knows which trade is honest.

HAR. There are flaws in your flannels but you see them not.

DOG. There are flaws in your phrases and all can see them.

HAR. You can't tell a rule in rhetoric from a draper's yard-stick.

DOG. I can tell a draper competitor as far as I can see him.

HAR. Come, Mr. Public, let's be friends.

DOG. I'm everybody's friend. It's good for business.

HAR. Can Henslowe tell a play from a dream-book?

DOG. Henslowe's a genius.

HAR. So I said in the Mercury. You remembered that. The public repeats my phrases as though they were his own. I tell you now that Henslowe's daft to think to get a play from Marlowe. The only things you get from Marlowe are fumes of rum.

DOG. I heard a play of Marlowe's once, a brave tragedy full of lofty things.

HAR. Yes, they're crammed with pompous matter. He writes them in reeking taverns, 'mid the pools of beer.

DOG. Of course I'm blind and deaf and dumb, but Marlowe's play did make me sad and tender with fine magical words, and the actors spake their lines with nice discrimination. And when the play was ended I stamped and shouted with the rest to see the villian get his due. That was at Blackfriars here.

HAR. What sort of man is Henslowe?

DOG. He's mild and courteous.

SCENE III.

Sir DOGBERRY, Sir HARRINGTON, HENSLOWE.

HEN. (*entering suddenly.*) Damnation! May the foul fiend take these playwrights!

HAR. (*turning.*) Who's cursing?

DOG. God calm you, Mr. Henslowe, what's the matter?

HEN. I'm ruined, friends.

HAR. It happens every day, and the sun still rises.

HEN. Beshrew these frivolous writers.

DOG. What's happened, now?

HEN. Black misfortune. You can have no seat on Saturday, Sir Critic

HAR. Why not?

HEN. And here's your money, Mr. Public.

DOG. Well, this is strange. A manager refunding entrance-money.

HEN. My announcements are upset.

HAR. Then set up others.

DOG. What's wrong?

HEN. There's to be no performance.

DOG. But the queen is to come.

HEN. Aye, and Henslowe will be dishonored.

DOG. Nay, not that.

HEN. Yes, that. I ordered a play. God pity me, I ordered a tragic piece from Marlowe.

HAR. That pot-house bard?

DOG. "The Massacre?"

HAR. A pretty topic for a play.

HEN. Well, Marlowe has thrown me down, the scribbling hound.

HAR. I suppose he's in his cups. I understand why there's to be no performance.

DOG. These writers are uncertain as the temper of the queen.

HEN. From the evil dregs of his ink-horn, he wrote the first two acts, two thumping acts, as brave as any I've read, and then he told me his unmentionable miseries, in eloquent voice, and I grew soft, and advanced him money.

HAR. Unmentionable error.

HEN. Damnable error. I'm still waiting for the final acts. Marlowe went God knows where, writing poems on ale-tables celebrating grapes and bar-maids, spending money on roystering fellows everywhere, the money for unwritten acts. Today he's flat in the hospital with a fever, and couldn't scrawl a worthy line.

HAR. I'll avenge you, Henslowe, by denouncing him in the Mercury.

HEN. No play . . . no play for Saturday . . . and the queen comes.

DOG. Can't you arrange a sprightly pageant, miracle, or tricky composition as will please her Majesty?

HEN. Such things take time.

HAR. Well, polish up some ancient commonplace, revamp the lines, a spatter here and there of tragedy and wit, and Henslowe will be saved.

HEN. Henslowe will be hanged, and all his theatre wrecked. The queen is fretful when her will is crossed, and dramatists are naught but wooden pawns, whose sacrifice prevents the queen from capture by King Ennui.

DOG. But Henslowe, beauty and wit may save the day. You miss the wit, that's true. . . .

HAR. Dogberry is a fool.

HEN. Buf, gentlemen . . .

DOG. You musn't cower on the eve of battle. A little strategy, and so you'll win.

HEN. But queens, like dramatists, are unreliable.

DOG. I'll avenge you, Henslowe, in the Mercury.

DOG. And if you lack for costumes, call on me in Lombard St.

HEN. (*absently.*) Thank you, gentlemen.

HAR. And if your hanged . . . (*Henslowe winces.*) I'll write a nice epitaph that will soften Marlowe.

HEN. Don't be in a hurry.

(*Exeunt Har. and Dog.*)

HEN. I'll not be hanged . . . (*He calls.*) Hey, gentlemen of the Blackfriar troupe . . . Hey . . . All hands on deck.

SCENE IV.

HENSLOWE, OLIVIO, BURBATRICK, TARLETAN, CANDELL,
Comedians, then WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

HEN. Gentlemen: your manager is beset with perils. Of course he always gets the blame for what you do, or do not do. I am the creature that's responsible for all your crimes. You merely act, and act provoking bad . . . But I am most indulgent . . . (*Groans*) I humor you . . . pay your salaries . . . (*Gestures of negation.*) More than you are worth . . . Today we face a task . . . (*More groans.*) We are all here? . . . Is everyone here?

BUR. All here save one.

HEN. Who's missing?

BUR. Will Shakespeare.

HEN. Him we could spare, but call him, some one.

OL. I'll call him, Mr. Henslowe.

BUR. He was looking through the window at the kites.

HEN. Tell our truant we have business to discuss.

(*Exit Olivio.*)

HEN. Looking at kites, when Henslowe is to hang.

ALL. Hang!

HEN. I see you're cheerful.

BUR. What's your offence?

HEN. I'll tell you. . . .

(*Enter Olivio and Shakespeare.*)

HEN. Here's Mr. Shakespeare . . . I'm to be hanged, my boy.

SHA. Ah! Who takes the role of hangman? Is that my part?

HEN. Yóu show a pleasant eagerness.

SHA. Hangmen do serve the state as I serve Henslowe, cheerfully or gaily dutiful.

HEN. That's faithfulness.

OL. We'll rehearse the execution.

SHA. I'm fair in minor roles. Perhaps I'd be effective. . . .

HEN. My role is not inviting.

OL. Shall we rehearse?

HEN. Hanging is entertaining to all but one. But this is not a court of justice. . . .

OL. We've found that out.

HEN. It's a den of crooks. And though as actor, Will, you've never scored a hit, you have a practical mind that's fertile at suggestion. We're in a fix.

SHA. I'm good at dodging apple-cores, to keep the audience, likewise, from scoring hits.

BUR. But apples meant for you, hit me, and I was most capable.

SHA. And incapable at dodging.

HEN. You're rather handy, Will. With parts of masks, and ghosts, you can be both dumb and dreadful. And your advice is often good, and now I need all counsel I can get. We're in a mess.

SHA. What's the matter, Henslowe?

HEN. Why, Marlowe is drunk again, and the "Massacre of Paris" will not take place.

SHA. No "Massacre?"

HEN. And Saturday, the queen comes.

SHA. Yes. Queens love massacres.

HEN. What's to be done, thou man of invention?

SHA. What's in the repertory that's not too tiresome?

HEN. We've pieces that are good enough for common folk but not for queens. Our plays are out of date. We have no novelties, nothing to wheedle smiles or tears from queens.

SHA. The medicine-chest at Blackfriars is rather low on drugs. But we must see what's there. What sort of plays are suitable to queens . . . Historical pastorals? . . .

HEN. Not those . . .

SHA. Well, something rather tragic . . . "The Battle of Alcazar," there's a bloody row in that . . . or "the Moor's Revenge," with harrowing scenes . . .

OL. These are too well known.

SHA. There is "Gammer Gurton's Needle," and there's "The King and the Beggar."

HEN. We have no beggar.

BUR. I once played the beggar.

OL. It must have been before you got your beard. A bearded lady would scarcely charm a king.

BUR. Olivio can take the part.

OL. (*warningly.*) Sh!

SHA. There's "The Persecution of the Christians." Nym made a hit in that as the tyrant, and later died of indigestion. When he spoke the hall rocked.

BUR. I filled his place . . .

HEN. You would fill anything. You are too fat for a tyrant. Lean tyrants are more reasonably unjust. We had a red costume for the part. Is it still in the wardrobe?

SHA. Aye, but it's yellow, now.

HEN. Let it stay there till it turns to purple. Have we the wigs of the play?

SHA. Nay, the rats have them.

HEN. We could play without the wigs.

SHA. How about the bald actors?

HEN. Let them wear turbans.

SHA. In a Roman play?

HEN. In anything. I don't care what they wear. Hoity, toity, it seems remarkable that we haven't one amusing comedy among our wares. What was that play about pulverized bones in a pastry?

OL. Mr. Henslowe, I know of a play that will amuse queens.

HEN. Let's see the thing.

OL. I'll get it.

(*Exit Olivio*)

SHA. There's a play in which a prevaricating judge is skinned alive on the stage. It's most exciting. The false skin is in the store-room.

HEN. Good. Leave it there.

SHA. There's another play in which a tender mother devours her children after boiling them. It has lyric beauty. We stood the stew-pot in the center of the stage.

HEN. I remember that stew-pot. It was a tearful tragedy of abnormal appetite. And, by the way, that play might cause a queen to smile. Who was the author of the piece?

SHA. Marlowe.

HEN. Out upon him! The scamp! We'll play nothing of his. I'll be skinned alive first. What's Olivio got?

(*Enter Olivio with manuscript.*)

HEN. What's that? A play?

OL. It is. I bring salvation to Blackfriar.

HEN. A comedy?

OL. A comedy that is most tragic. It's about some lovers.

HEN. Nothing original in that. We've had plays about such things before. Is it modern?

OL. Most modern. As modern as the pyramids, and shot like silken tapestry with gold threads of to-day.

HEN. Is it one we know?

OL. We've never played it.

HEN. Fie, lad. Take these lovers back to the archives. We'll have noth-

ing that requires rehearsals. We'd like something modern, but not new to us. Take the play back.

OL. But this one we have all rehearsed.

HEN. How's that?

OL. Each of the Blackfriar players has learned his part in secret.

HEN. A conspiracy against the management. I didn't know there was secrecy among actors. Who wrote the play?

OL. One of our troupe.

HEN. Rubbish! Give me the script.

(Olivio passes manuscript to Henslowe.)

OL. 'Tis a tender story, as full of poetry as skies are filled with stars.

HEN. I'll see the script. What's the title? Ah! *(He reads.)* "The Tragic History of Romeo and Juliet." Is this Italian?

OL. An Italian story by an Englishman.

HEN. What Englishman? *(Reading)* "William Shakerpeare." Is this our Will?

OL. Aye.

HEN. I'll have none of it. No experiments here you understand. I'm much too old for that. This is no school for playwrights. I'm an experienced producer.

OL. But the lines are learned and ready for rehearsal.

HEN. That's something gained, and yet methinks I smell a plot to trick me into doing a thing that's fateful.

OL. Well, do it.

HEN. I must reflect. The title tells me naught. I'll scan the text. And now, to spend the time to profit, I think the company had best rehearse some shaky portions of their catalogue of plays. Though plays be bad, it's always good to try your elocution on rickety rhythms and on banal business. You may go, my children, to rehearsal.

OL. We were rehearsing when you called us.

HEN. Go to rehearsal. Always rehearse. You need it. What were you rehearsing?

OL. The third act of "The Massacre."

HEN. Zounds! There are but two.

OL. We found another in our heads.

HEN. A clever flock, a gallant bright impromptu company of talents. My compliments. We'll hear what you have improvised. Ha! Romeo and Juliet, by William Shakespeare, at Blackfriars. Ho, ho, ho. A dramatist is born. *(He is much abused.) (Exeunt all except Olivio and Shakespeare.)*

SHA. Thanks, comrade.

OL. That man would do to bait the bears in Shore Ditch, but actor folk could spare him.

SHA. He risks his fortune on uncharted seas, and managers, after several wrecks, become a timid breed.

OL. And poets also do some foundering in uncharted seas.

SHA. That's their occupation.

OL. The elements are needless.

SHA. So are poets. Let's talk of something pleasant.

OL. Of Romeo and Juliet?

SHA. That has an unpleasant end.

OL. We'll shut the book before we reach the end.

SHA. If that were possible.

OL. The lovers in the play did shut the book themselves.

SHA. Capricious twain they were.

OL. A protest to the Capulets and Montagues. That was their jest, a pathetic jest.

SHA. Well, life is full of piquancy and stings. There's a deal of pepper in it, and little sweets, though most prefer the sweets.

OL. We women reach for sweets, and get the other seasoning.

SHA. Well, you, Olivio, are the rarest of confections. The play was writ for you.

OL. My Romeo has made a play for me.

SHA. Plays are frail things, Olivo, and mostly made of words, and mostly poorly wrought, but you are the fairest subject that ever tempted author.

OL. I'm spiteful as the wind in March. You'd best take care, lest I do nip you when I'm not in balmy disposition.

SHA. I'll get a cloak, when the weather is unruly.

OL. I see you're reckless like other bards and take no heed of the weather till the frost comes.

SHA. O, I can tell a sunny day from one when the rain falls and love runs to shelter.

OL. I would hide with thee from the storms of ourselves that threaten.

SHA. You shall. We'll be a chilly pair together when boughs drip on our wayward backs, and the paths we go are packed with trouble. What moots the pain if we're there together.

OL. Why, we'll sing in the rain to forget the cold and the wet and the woe, if sing we can.

SHA. But I must warn you, sweet Olivio, to be a little negligent of my curt ways, my lips that grow sardonic, and my speech that's often crisp with queer hostilities, and spleen.

OL. I'll call them poet's raptures.

SHA. My rapture is Olivio, when all is said.

OL. I'm quite content. And now, farewell. I'll go to look me in a mirror to see a girl that's happy.

SHA. Look for my happiness in your mirror. Farewell, thou great-heart, Juliet.

(Exit Olivio. Shakespeare goes to window and is soon lost in abstraction. Henslowe enters hurriedly with a comedian.)

HEN. *(to comedian)* This is my plan. Marlowe is a scoundrel. I've told you that. But wherever he is, you may depend on it that he is writing lines that would enchant the devil. Marry, sir, it's true, and here is my arrangement. Marlowe, I trust him not, but he's no debutant.

(To Shakespeare.) Do you hear that, Mr. Ghost?

SHA. *(without taking his gaze from the street)* Marlowe's a genius.

HEN. Good, and so am I, for I am bound to get the "Massacre," but if I fail I'll use your play. I'm in a trap and can't do otherwise. This is no breeding-place of playwrights. First plays are trash. And would-be dramatists are something worse than trash. What think you, Mr. Shakespeare?

SHA. My play is trash, and Marlowe's Massacre is trash. Most entertaining trash.

HEN. And the queen comes.

SHA. Well, I could write no better lines for queens than for one named Henslowe.

HEN. If Marlowe cannot save me from the noose, I hope 'twill be your lines. Who's this?

(Tom Hathaway appears.)

HEN. Who are you?

TOM. Tom Hathaway.

HEN. That tells me naught. Whom seek you?

TOM. That fellow yonder.

HEN. O! Well, take him. There he is. I'll look for Marlowe.

(Exit Henslowe.)

SCENE V.

SHAKESPEARE, TOM HATHAWAY.

TOM. Ah, ha, friend poet.

SHA. *(turning from window)* Rest you merry, Tom Hathaway.

TOM. Aye, to be sure, and come direct from Stratford at my sister's mute behest, to tell you what he thinks of poets and their ways.

SHA. I expected you.

TOM. I'll mince no words. You did a villainous thing to leave my sister Ann.

SHA. How fares she?

TOM. She doesn't fare at all, thanks to the tribe of ballad-mongers. She's ill these days.

SHA. 'Tis pity.

TOM. Yea, her youth you spoiled by idleness, and broke her heart. She's ailing.

SHA. You know why I left Stratford, you and she. You wished to be respectable. I left your respectability, and came to London.

TOM. A pretty poet's trick, to spoil a likely home.

SHA. You wanted your salvation and I gave you that.

TOM. I gave you good advice.

SHA. Brother-in-law's advice.

TOM. You would not quit your idle life. Ah, why did you ever meet my sister? 'Twas an ill-omened friendship.

SHA. I happened to be born in Stratford, and so did Ann. My kinsmen had some fields and orchards there. The Hathaways had their acres, too, and Ann and I strolled in flowered lanes of Warwick, and heard the bells ring and saw the Avon slip between the storied downs. Our families wanted us to wed. We wedded, Ann and I.

TOM. An excellent day it was for Ann, to wed a man without a trade save that of filching other people's pheasants. You could easily have got a clerkship in the town, for you were fair at mathematics.

SHA. Your ways and mine are not the same.

TOM. Ah, idling is an easier trade. To sing tumultuous songs with Bedford tipplers, to brawl with Suey's wardens, to scale a park wall and run down a buck. That's easier.

SHA. It keeps one rather busy.

TOM. To sit for hours by the hedge doing nothing and then to scratch some words about it, while people in the town are hard at work at desk and bench, while people in the great champagnes slice the tall grain and tend to England's herds. A poetaster.

SHA. You had your revenge.

TOM. I did my duty.

SHA. Thou man of duty. Stratford let loose her scandalous tongue, the sheriff hooted me down in cheerful parlors, the justice told pleasant, confidential stories, my brother-in-law libelled me leader of gypsies and renegades, my wife did worse. Stratford was much amused. At last I wandered forth. And that is all. I came to London.

TOM. To fall still lower.

SHA. Silence! Do those who drove me from Stratford, drive me from London, too?

TOM. Here's one to do the driving.

(Enter Ann)

SCENE VI.

SHAKESPEARE, TOM HATHAWAY, ANN HATHAWAY.

SHA. Ann! Rest you merry.

ANN. I'll rest, but not merry.

SHA. The road from Stratford is an affliction. Are you weary?

ANN. Aye, and dusty.

SHA. You came by post-chaise?

ANN. Of course.

SHA. I walked. I know the road is dusty.

ANN. 'Tis a vile trip, walking or riding.

SHA. If the mood is vile, the road is vile. The scenery is rather fine.

ANN. Little I saw save clouds of dust.

SHA. You should walk.

ANN. And rank myself with minstrels, strolling fellows, and players. A goodly hint. But thank you, no. The chaise is bad, but I prefer the chaise. Besides I come to town with gloomy business to perform.

SPE. What's that?

ANN. My divorce.

SPE. I want you my aid, such as it is.

ANN. You are most kind, unusually kind, in one who had so many waves of anger on his lips.

SPE. Will you this from spite. Is there some one who can annul the bonds?

TOM. The canon of Winchester will break the bonds.

SPE. You have it done.

ANN. Good-bye, you and farewell.

SPE. Well!

TOM. This is ended, sister, we'll take a stroll in Fleet Street,

and look at London. It's a most demoralizing town, they say.
(*Exit Ann and Tom.*) (*Explosion of hurrahs outside.*)

SCENE VII.

SHAKESPEARE, OLIVIO, COMEDIANS, THEN HENSLOWE.

OL. Ah, poet, I bring you news to glad your heart. The play's to be given Saturday before the queen.

SHA. (*absently*) Ah, yes, the play. The Massacre has noble lines.

OL. The Massacre. No Massacre that night. We give a play of love immortal. Why are you sad, friend poet?

SHA. An ugly dream in the day. But among my comrades I'll put away that dream. What was it you said? O, yes. The play. What play?

OL. Why, "Romeo and Juliet."

SHA. I owe this all to you, dear friends, and thank you for it. God send the lines embarrass you not with too much rhetoric and break-neck cadences to glut you with a mess of verbiage. If the lines fail, your art will not falter, for that is of the best.

(*Enter Henslowe.*)

HEN. I have to choose a crazy author or a debutant. We give your play, Will What's-your-name, on Saturday night before the queen and court, and here's my grave suspicion that I hang, and that you will hang to keep me cheerful.

SHA. . . Aye, we'll hang together, then, and the gallows shall keep us from quarrelling.

HEN. Let's see the cast again. You, Tartin, play the Romeo, you Canfield are Mercutio, Burbatrick is Tybald. Who's Juliet?

SHA. Olivio.

HEN. O, surely, then, we're ready for rehearsal.

SHA. On the stage, fellow players, on the stage.

OL. Now Marlowe will be jealous.

End of Act I.

ACT. II.

In front of the Blackfriars theatre, London. The theatre itself is a brick-colored octagonal structure at right. Above the main entrance, a red silk flag on a gilded staff. The walls bear a gigantic poster, with the name of the play, "Romeo and Juliet." At back, a view of London and the river Thames. At left, an inn, with tables and stools in front of the door.

SCENE I.

LANDLORDS, WAITERS, HOSTLERS.

LAN. Toby, Peter, John. You lazy spawn of taverns . . . the intermission is at hand . . . Hey, sirrahs and laggards . . . Arrange these tables . . . do you hear . . . the queen's at the play . . . we must make an impression . . . Hola, Francis!

FRAN. (*off stage*) In a minute.

LAN. Come here!

FRAN. In a minute.

LAN. Come now.

FRAN. (*off stage*) In a minute, master.

LAN. (*furiously*) Ah, Mr. Francis-in-a-minute, you will change to Francis-right-away.

(*Exit landlord.*)

(*Enter Shakespeare.*)

SCENE II.

SHAKESPEARE, WAITER.

WAIT. Good-morrow, sir.

SHA. Good-morrow, friend.

WAIT. Will you have some liquor?

SHA. Nay. I'll have some rest.

WAIT. Stranger?

SHA. I'm an actor at Blackfriars.

WAIT. Oh, (*His manner changes.*) We professionals have a hard life. But you'd best not stay here long without drinking. The landlord'll bid you move.

SHA. Well, let him tell me.
 WAIT. You see, it's time for the intermission.
 SHA. Ah! The play. I understand.
 WAIT. I pay no attention to plays. I attend to audiences.
 SHA. Is there a good audience to-day at the play?
 WAIT. A noble audience. The court's at theatre to-day.
 SHA. Humm! Think of it!
 WAIT. Oh, I think we'll have a good day.
 SHA. Perhaps you'll serve the queen.
 WAIT. If I do, she'll be well served.
 SHA. Then you'll be famous. A waiter to the queen.
 WAIT. Queen or commoner, the most famous thing of all is the tip.
 SHA. Well, here's the most famous thing. (*He tips him.*)
 WAIT. Thank you, actor. (*Noise of voices.*)
 SHA. Here comes patronage. (*Louder voices.*) Noisy patronage.

SCENE III.

SHAKESPEARE, LORDS EGLAMOUR, BRISK, FASTIDIOUS,
 Valets, etc.

EG. Give place, fellows . . . More space for gentlemen. Ha, the colors of Essex yonder. His flunkys are everywhere under your feet. Make way, discourteous valets.

BR. We had a pleasant dinner, friends. French wines are delicious.

EG. They are. I drank a sip too much. I always drink too much. So did Fastidious.

FAS. Hush, I'm thinking.

EG. Ho, he's thinking. That's why he looks like an owl of the wood.

BR. He always looks so when he's drunk, a morbid look, a melancholy habitude of thought that makes him have an air of vacancy.

EG. Of what do you think? The puppet-booths of Fleet Street, or your lady's fan?

BR. Grant you, he thinks of nothing like the rest of us gentlefolk.

FAS. I've ended a sonnet.

EG. I'm right. He was occupied with nothing. What's it about?

FAS. Don Cupid, prince of small-clothes and cotillions.

BR. A heavy subject.

EG. Tell us the sonnet. I'll set some music to it. We'll make it a tilting love lay and dedicate it to a lady that I know. I'll sing it to her.

BR. Sing it not to us, for we'll not listen. Your voice is like a hound on the hunt.

FAS. The hunt's the melody, mostly.

BR. Let's have some pleasure. What say you? We'll make a noise in the theatre.

EG. Magnificent. We'll make impressive entry and spoil the play.

FAS. That's more diversion than writing sonnets. We'll go in.

(*They enter theatre.*)

SCENE IV.

WAITER, SHAKESPEARE.

WAIT...Good riddance to the scurvy crew.

SHA. Here's money for your wisdom, friend.

WAIT. Thank you. I like not their lady's wear, perfumeries, and dainty affectations. A man should be a man.

SHA. Well, these are feminine men or devils. They'll spoil the play with their noise. They'll throw cores and shells at the actors.

WAIT. Yes, but if the queen gets wroth with their nonsense, she'll have the starch taken from their fluffy lordships.

(*Exit waiter.*)

(*Enter landlord.*)

LAN. (*to Shak.*) What will you have, sir?

SHAK. I thank you, nothing.

LAN. Sherry? Ratifia? Port? Cognac?

SHA. I'm resting for a moment, and will have no drink.

LAN. Beer?

SHA. Nothing, thanks.

LAN. Then you'll excuse, but this table is reserved.

SHA. O, indeed. I'll take another place. (*He moves.*)
 LAN. And so is this reserved.
 SHA. I see. They're all reserved.
 LAN. Seats are for those who drink.
 SHA. I'll buy some water.
 LAN. That sort of drink we do not sell.
 SHA. Well, sell me silence. (*He tosses him coin.*)
 LAN. We'll serve you that. (*He pockets the coin.*)
 (*People come from theatre.*)
 Hey, waiters, here's the intermission. Francis! Toby!
 (*He bustles about.*)

SCENE V.

Same, DOGBERRY, HARRINGTON, policeman, costermonger, book-dealer, various town-folk, etc.

People from the theatre and adjacent streets swarm on the stage, soldiers in brown jackets, servants in blue livery, men in flat caps and coats of goat-skin, gentlemen in ribbons and plumes, sergeants-at-arms in leathern cloaks, and burghers in serge. Everybody smokes, including the women. Costermongers sell their wares.

POL. Move on, move on.

EG. The place was hot. Here, peddler, some sweetmeats.

BOOK. Pamphlets, play-books, pamphlets. "The Almanac of the Crow." "The latest News from Hell," for a penny. "London's Seven Sins," a tract to keep you laughing. "Different Methods of Smoking," an informing document by a professional. Cards, cards to play during the performance.

POL. Move on, move on.

EG. There were some pretty women at the spectacle.

FAS. Attracted by our garb.

HAR. The play was indecent. (*To Shak.*) Will you allow me to sit at your table?

SHA. Certainly. (*To Harrington.*) So the play was bad?

HAR. Uncommon bad. I'll speak of it in my paper, "The Mercury." (*To landlord.*) Have you some writing things, landlord?

LAN. They'll be brought, Sir Critic. And wine?

HAR. What you please. (*Exit landlord.*)

DOG. Well, Mr. Critic, I heard your groans and cat-calls.

SHA. How critics suffer.

DOG. The play was a brave play.

SHA. Ah!

HAR. Common! Common!

SHA. Was there much hissing?

DOG. At first, but not for long. The queen objected. Then there was no more hissing.

SHA. I warrant you there wasn't.

HAR. There were storms of applause after that.

SHA. Of such is appreciation.

HAR. No brilliance . . . and bad construction. (*He writes.*) Diction full of flowers of rhetoric . . . a miserable work. . . .

DOG. I stamped my feet.

EG. Amanda had a mirror trimmed with plumes.

BR. It's a senseless play.

FAS. I don't know what it's about.

EG. I care not.

BR. (*yawning.*) Is there another act?

FAS. I'm afraid so.

SHA. The play must have made a hit.

DOG. 'Twas a nice play with great meanings and pretty language.

HAR. A babble of nonsense.

BR. Was it something about a feud? I didn't get the meanings.

EG. I got a wink from Amanda full of meaning.

HAR. The play is stolen from the Italian. I recognized some phrases.

DOG. I have no learning, but I was entertained.

(*Three blasts of the trumpet are heard at the theatre door. The crowd moves into the theatre.*)

DOG. The fifth act, sir Critic. We'll go back in.

HAR. I'll not go in again. I must finish my article at the office of the Mercury.

DOG. Well, I'll not miss the play.

HAR. Don't miss my article in the Mercury.

DOG. I can't promise as to that. Good-by, Critic.

HAR. Good-by, Public.

(Harrington leaves, and Dogberry returns to the theatre.)

SCENE VI.

SHAKESPEARE, LORDS EGLAMOUR, BRISK. FASTIDIOUS, then
HENSLOWE.

BR. Shall we see the fifth act?

EG. My God, no. A plague on these serious plays.

FAS. If it were only a bear-fight.

EG. I like droll things, burlesques, and such. That a play please me Darby must have her Joan, and the affair end brightly in a jolly couplet. The queen and Essex spoil the fun, so we can make no row within. I say we'd better stay outside to smoke and tell some stories.

BR. But what of the play?

EG. Hang the play. I didn't hear it. We didn't see the beginning. Why should we wish to see the end?

BR. We'll let it end at the fourth act.

FAS. Perhaps, 'twill be a better ending than the author made.

SHA. Sweet playwrights, you.

FAS. What do you mean?

EG. I dedicate this yawn to the author. *(He yawns.)*

SHA. Your yawn is more perfect than your opinion.

EG. What's that? I don't think I know you, fellow.

SHA. I'll introduce myself. I'm one who's taking notes on toilets and breeding. Can you instruct?

EG. This fellow's most annoying. *(To Shakespeare.)* What is your will with us?

SHA. My will is to admire. I'm from the country and city men are new to me. I never thought there were such wonders. Your beard is marvelously cut. 'Tis very like a scraper, and this one is like a fan, and that one like a T. A most unique design. *(He touches Eglamour's beard.)*

EG. This is insolence.

SHA. Is that what it is?

EG. Here's cure for impertinence. *(He draws sword.)*

(Shakespeare draws his sword.)

BR. Surely, you would not fight a man without knowing his name.

SHA. Name, I have none. Fame is my foster-mother.

EG. I'll not fight with an unknown fellow.

(Eglamour, Brisk, and Fastidious disappear, Henslowe enters.)

HEN. Tut, tut, friend ghost. No nonsense.

SHA. A little exercise for a disordered mind.

HEN. Put away that sword. I've news that's pleasant. I bless the star that brought you here, for you've brought me luck.

SHA. How so?

HEN. The play you wrote has taken hold of popularity, and never to let go. The court applauds, the queen doth drench a costly handkerchief with royal tears. That's something gained, you know. The public's hat is in the air, and fortune has turned a smiling face to the Blackfriar troupe.

SHA. I thought otherwise.

(Applause from the theatre.)

HEN. The play is greatly liked. You hear the noise in the theatre?

SHA. Applause and hooting sound alike, when the mind quakes.

HEN. Well, let the quaking cease, and take a sweet expression, dramatist, for the queen comes hither, and grants you audience. I've come to warn you, so you'll smile.

SHA. What does the queen want?

HEN. You'll know the wants of Essex and herself.

SHA. Let them come. But I must thank you, Henslowe. You have labored hard, with hopes unpromising.

HEN. Thank not me. I was of men the most suspicious of your worth. I found you out by desperate accident. But I deserve no praise, and ask none. Thank yourself.

(Lords Eglamour and the others re-appear.)

EG. *(to the others.)* I stopped in time. I very near debased my sword. The fellow was only a playwright. I'm curious now to see the end of the play. We'll go into the theatre.

(They enter theatre.)

HEN. I'll make a contract with you, now. You shall play comedy, and I shall not object. I'll let you now mend ancient plays, with pleasure, and make them new, and make some works of your own. I'll pay in advance.

SHA. Remember Marlowe.

HEN. I thank him for his spree, for now I've found another dramatist. *(The crowd surges from the theatre, guardsmen form a line and then the royal company, preceded by torch-bearers, appears. Lords Brisk, Eglamour, and Fastidious are seen among the group.)*

EG. *(to the other lords.)* We will pay our respects to the queen. It will vex Essex.

HEN. *(to Shakespeare.)* Your clothes are a little out of style for a royal audience, but I suppose they'll have to do.

SHA. She has seen ragged motley, before now, and besides, I have no other.

HEN. I'll show you what 'tis to be bold before a queen. Managers are brave by habit. I cannot vouch for playwrights. Are your knees all right?

SHA. They'll hold me up. I think.

HEN. Courage, then, for here they come.

(The queen and Essex appear, followed by courtiers and maids of honour. The actors group themselves near the theatre to offer homage.)

SCENE VII.

Same, ELIZABETH, ESSEX

CROWD. Long live the queen!

ES. Who is the playwright and manager of the Blackfriar?

HEN. I am the manager, my lord.

ES. My compliments, Henslow, and where's the author?

HEN. This is the author, Mr. Shakespeare.

ES. *(to Shak.)* My praises for your work. 'Tis a great play, surely. Will you be presented to the queen?

SHA. My thanks, my lord. I am at your service.

ES. *(to the queen)* Your majesty, the author of the play that pleased us. *(Shakespeare kneels before the queen.)*

EL. Kneel not to me. I'll tell you what I think when you are on your feet. Your play is taken from the life, I think, with touches of fantasy, the prettiest history of love that ever I did hear, and grant you health and many years to write some other like it, to entertain our English race.

(She extends her hand, which Shakespeare kisses.)

SHA. Gracious lady, I'm pleased to be approved of by your majesty, and now can labor on with added zest, since I am strengthened by your patronage.

EL. Essex will give his patronage as well.

ES. Your play is wrought in sad realities, pathetic loves unvanquished by a storm of family prejudice. Your work is full of finest artistries and jewelled words. You have described with fascinating wizardry the potency of love unconquerable, the loves of youth, a most romantic and imperishable story. You have the thanks of Essex for your tragic masterpiece.

SHA. I'm pleased by praise from such distinguished lips, but you should praise the talented Blackfriar players for their art, and take no thought of the author. Their work is your enjoyment, more than mine.

ES. I thank the clever players, too, of Blackfriars. Gentlemen, you are masters of a difficult craft, and make it seem to undiscerning eyes most easy.

(The players bow.)

ES. *(to Shakespeare.)* And, playwright, we have met before. I know you as something else than playwright.

EL. You've met?

ES. Some days ago, some enemies engaged me in a public brawl, and I got assistance from a stranger sword. My champion was this playwright, here, and now I thank him as a man-at-arms as well as man-of-letters.

SHA. Your praise is far too generous. The aid I gave was small to one so great.

EL. I'd like to have you visit Windsor, when you can spare the time.

SHA. Whenever you summon me, I'll come.

EL. I'll send a summons much too soon. Look out for it, for if you fail to come, I'll have you flogged as an ungracious poet.

SHA. I'll try to avoid the whip, your majesty.

ES. We'll look for you at Windsor.

SHA. I am a lucky dramatist, indeed.

EL. Farewell, my friend.

SHA. Farewell, your gracious majesty, and excellent sir.

ES. Farewell, Shakespeare.

(The queen, Essex, and retinue depart.)

HEN. *(to players.)* A fine day's work, my worthy players, for the Blackfriars and its manager.

(Exit Henslowe and comedians. A pause, then Olivio appears at entrance of theatre in the costume of Juliet.)

SCENE VIII.

SHAKESPEARE, OLIVIO, then ESSEX.

SHA. Olivio!

OL. No, not she. I'm Juliet.

SHA. You are a little finer than the one that I imagined.

OL. I'm an actor in women's roles. No Juliet am I.

SHA. You're a mocking wisp of womanly delusion.

OL. And you're a saucy actor fellow.

SHA. 'Tis dangerous for a dream to masquerade as woman, for I might hope to seize a dream in a London street.

OL. And scandal up the citizens.

SHA. Romeo did not mind a citizen or two, so long as he had the dream.

OL. Well! Romeo was Italian bred, and you are English.

SHA. Then I will love as do the English, somewhat awkwardly, as though it were a sin. If Neapolitan fevers do not heat our Northern blood, we'll be a little calm, as calm as it is possible for us to be who live where Avon woos the violet haze of English downs.

OL. But I am humbly born.

SHA. Ah, you are charming as a dell of Devon, a mummer most fantastical, actor of women's parts, and child of fancy's realm, you are of mortals most delightful, fashioned of delicate stuff, and wiles most hazardous to men, your grace, tempestuous heart, and temperament of masquer hath unmasked my soul, and it is evident to me as you that I am groping in a maze of passionate dark while you are near.

OL. I'll go.

SHA. Nay, stay.

OL. You are an English Romeo. I did not think the English were that way.

SHA. I'm nothing 'bout your lover.

OL. And I'm your love, if it suits your fancy. But I am a wilding love with moody manners as other women are, and liable to sudden hatreds and spiteful tongue, like Juliet had been had Juliet lived.

SHA. The lovers died to keep their love from growing gross and fretful with the times, their tongue from waxing tense and mellowed o'er with commonplace. That's why they died.

OL. The sad, young foolish things.

SHA. Yea, truly. But we will live and weave a web of unreality and keep our dream of youth and rose—leaf faith amid the flare of London's hate and England's scorn, and be, pale necromancers, in this vale of Thames, oblivious of all cruel histories.

OL. Yes, let us live that way.

SHA. It needs a deal of forgetfulness.

OL. Then, we'll forget.

(They embrace as Essex enters.)

ES. Ah! A player in women's parts and a poet! Excuse me, friends.

SHA. Essex, you know our secret, now.

ES. Romance yet lives, I see. A player in women's parts. My compliments, my friends, for you are sly, and acting is, indeed, a gay deception. Long live romance.

SHA. My lord, we hope you'll not betray us.

ES. Oh, I can keep a secret, friends . . . The queen hath sent this ring in friendly token. Wear it in honor.

SHA. I thank your highness.

ES. And Juliet is as charming off stage as in your play. My compliments. *(Exit Essex.)*

SCENE IX.

SHAKESPEARE, OLIVIO, HENSLOWE, COMEDIANS then ANN.

HEN. We'll celebrate, my friends, for all our high successes, and something's due our Ghost for work he's done to make our company famous. We'll carry him through London streets. Up where gleam the puppet-booths of the Strand. Hurrah for Will of the Blackfriars.

(They carry him out triumphantly. There is a pause and Ann enters.)

ANN. He's gone, and I have nought but memories of dasied lanes of Warwick where the Avon saw us go, we twain, when we were young and roses bloomed in Stratford, and we were thrilled at even by the lark, and when we put our lips together where the oaks grew thick, and now he's otherwise and so am I.

(She bursts into tears.)

End of the Second Act.

ACT III.

Studio of the marquis of Winchester, Hampton court. Rich furniture and tapestry. At back, a large portico, closed with curtains. At right, entrance to conservatory. At left, entrance to art gallery.

SCENE I.

LORDS EGLEMOUR, BRISK, FASTIDIOUS.

EG. The lord treasurer takes his time.

BR. That is why he is lord treasurer.

FAS. What's the use of being lord treasurer if you can't make some one wait.

EG. I've been waiting twice as long as you, and hence should be doubly vexed.

BR. If your mission equals ours in urgency, you should gain audience at once.

EG. I come to make complaint against the favorite. You see my business is important.

FAS. Against Essex? Why, so do we.

BR. Ah, then we are unanimous that Essex is a nuisance.

EG. A tyrant over gentlefolk, the idol of the mob. I do not fancy him.

FAS. Nor I. He has youth, 'tis true, but we are not old of years. And valor? Well, aren't we bold, as well? And as for handsome looks and courtly mien, I think all maids can spare a look or two at us, for we have heaps of elegance. *(He plumes himself.)*

EG. That little plunge in the sea at Cadiz won him a name for valor.

FAS. And, Eglamour, we three would do the same.

EG. I've done the same. The other day I staked a hundred sovereigns I would swim the Thames in all my clothes and sword. I won the wager.

FAS. True, but you did not have to face the Spanish army as he did on the Spanish coast.

EG. No, there was worse to fear than that.

BR. Pray, what was that?

EG. The dread of taking cold, for that was probable, and then one's eyes stream copiously, and we have lost our dignity before the charming sex. And that's a dreadful fate. Who's here?

SCENE II.

Same, Marquis of WINCHESTER, TOM HATHAWAY, an usher.

USH. (*announcing*). His grace, the marquis of Winchester!

(*Winchester enters conversing with Hathaway.*)

WIN. You understand what we expect of you?

TOM. I do, my lord.

WIN. And you will serve me well?

TOM. Most faithfully. I owe you fealty for your kindly promise to assist us to obtain my sister Ann's divorce.

WIN. That can be done, and easier than you think. But not so easy is the other matter that I wish. To turn the towns of Warwick against Essex is not so easy done, as trafficking for divorces.

TOM. 'Tis dangerous work, but even that is possible.

WIN. Where is the danger?

TOM. The playwright has some influence there.

WIN. O! Shakespeare? I've taken care of that. The Stratford news I intercept. (*He looks toward Eglamour.*) Do you know these gentlemen?

TOM. I have that honor, sir. They are the richest lords in Warwickshire.

WIN. They are our future allies.

TOM. Then we can win, my lord. And I can expect the divorce?

WIN. The divorce has been granted this morning.

TOM. I thank you, sir, for your most friendly service, and I pledge my fealty in the Essex matter.

WIN. But Shakespeare has a friend in Essex, and Essex is powerful.

TOM. Let them go down together.

WIN. That would be a pleasant thing to see. Then I can depend on you?

TOM. As on yourself.

WIN. That's all, then. Fare-thee-well.

(*He signals usher to accompany Hathaway.*)

No, my lords, what is it you have to say? (*To usher.*) Guard the doors and galleries. Let no one enter.

EG. I challenged Essex. His reply was most inhuman. "When I have time to waste, I'll waste it, then, on you. I'm busy just at present." A gallant answer to a swordsman. What think you?

WIN. Most insolent. What grievance, now, have you, Lord Brisk?

BR. In Ludgate, yesterday, three of my men were set upon by some yeomen and were sore mistreated. I ask redress for this assault in common highway.

WIN. I'll see you get it. These outrages must cease. I'll have it so.

FAS. My lord, this morning in the park at Mary-le-bone, a ruffian band came dancing up, made me a butt of wit, and sought to have me shout for Essex.

WIN. And did you shout for Essex?

FAS. *Faith, that I did.* Nought else could I have done, unless I wished to bring away a battered sconce and ruined finery. I shouted, surely. Before twelve clubs what else was there to do? I shouted lustily for Essex, so loud you could hear me in the next town.

WIN. So, then, you all seek recompense. I'd offer you that, immediately, but I must use some craft, to make the vengeance seem a little indirect. To openly oppose this powerful, hateful man is to seek to leave my pretty corpse on mother scaffold, so I'll tread lightly. My cue is circumspection, or I'll have no place at all in the pretty masque when Essex falls. I'm Winchester, that is true, but he is Essex.

FAS. Is there naught to be done against this monster that cause us such uneasiness?

WIN. Hush, not so loud. The queen and Essex oft take walks in yonder gallery. And words sound loud, indeed, in courtly halls. Speak low, when you speak ill of powerful folk, or you will never speak at all, and that would scarcely be jolly for you gentlemen.

FAS. We'll whisper, then, if just to save our necks.

WIN. Whispering is better if no one sees you whisper. Let your eyes catch no figure lurking while you whisper. I have a word of cheer. The favorite's fall may happen any minute, sooner than you expect. Leicester is greater knave than Essex, and, furthermore, he's sly, and made of subtle

flatteries, and Essex cannot bend his back enough in mute acceptance. Elizabeth is wroth at times and vixenish in temper, and changeable as the weather. So every courtier must have his vane to tell what quarter winds do blow. And Essex scorns diplomacy, and grows more popular each day. The queen is watchful of his power and jealous. She can divide supremacy with none. Thus Essex is in danger. Let small pretext for difference arise, and Essex will seek another job. Such is the temper of Elizabeth.

FAS. We'll do our best to provide the occasion.

EG. How, gentlemen, can this be done?

WIN. I'll tell you how. The queen is wise. She pierces flattering speeches like a fine steel blade. If the cards are marked she'll tell you so. But artifices, rouge, and comfortable dressing-rooms do not cheat the testimony of her looking-glass. The queen is getting old, and queens get old like other folk. Elizabeth grows envious of youth. The beauty of her gentle-women makes her sour. And if her latest lover prove untrue . . .

EG. Essex? Untrue?

WIN. Aye. That might happen.

EG. Is there some other lady?

WIN. What do I know? I'm saying it might happen. I have evidence to ruin twenty favorites.

FAS. Well, this is news.

WIN. Now, there's business to be done. London must find disturbance day and night, and factions, quarrels, must be multiplied, so Essex will be blamed. Be gentle with his friends, and swallow his affronts, and then expose. Their fate will copy after Sydney's, who wrote no more pamphlets, after that defence of the favorite, as you recall. Do you see the way my lords?

BR. Perfectly.

WIN. Then follow it. And you must welcome lawlessness and help it on in Warwick where you live, for lawlessness is our present cause.

EG. I see 'tis time to hunt the fox.

FAS. And favorites.

WIN. Exactly. The merchants of Stratford will be with us, too. Tom Hathaway says so.

BR. Down with the favorite.

WIN. Yes.

USH. My lord, the gentleman you summoned has arrived.

WIN. What man?

USH. One called Shakespeare.

EG. Ha, the comedian.

WIN. Aye.

EG. Well, he's a friend of Essex, and also of the queen.

WIN. And of Winchester.

BR. Of you?

WIN. My strategies demand it. I have some use for every man. Leicester is not the only one that's sly. Shall I conduct you through the gardens? We'll talk of other things in cheerful negligence of favorite subjects. Follow me, gentlemen. *(Exeunt.)*

SCENE III.

SHAKESPEARE, OLIVIO, usher.

SHA. *(to usher.)* A letter of audience . . . the marquis of Winchester.

USH. I'll speak to his grace. *(Exit, closing curtain.)*

OL. This place is blazoned with magnificence, as well as coats of arms.

SHA. Aye, and blazoned, too, with subterfuge and gross duplicities of court and state. Art weary of the trip?

OL. O, nay. I am a woman most inquisitive and love to see the places of the titled ones. That's why I came, e'en though it was against your wish.

SHA. The purposes of Winchester are dark to me.

OL. If purposes are dark, they have fair surroundings.

SHA. This room is a velvet web of lies to close us in. 'Tis a study built for soft conspiracies, and books are strangers here.

OL. The tapestries are, yet, uniquely beautiful, and beauty, then, can aid in secrets dolorous.

SHA. There's one thing here that's surely fine, and that's Olivio.

OL. Ah, now, my lord. I'll tell you why I came. To see you do no mischief as conspirator.

SHA. Mayhap, you'll see me victimized for base designs. I know not the meaning of my visit, here.

OL. These ancient palaces are worth a visit, surely.

SHA. Was there ever woman that worshiped not at luxury's shrine? You are all alike.

OL. Our dwelling is, of course, more fair, since we live in fancy's palace.

SHA. A most uncertain dwelling.

OL. You ask too much.

SHA. I only ask surcease of care, and someone like Olivio to beguile me with soft forgeries of voice and womanly innuendo, to persuade me 'gainst my wits that she is truth.

OL. These poets ask too much.

SHA. Then I'll ask nothing. Women are like mirrors, easily broken.

OL. And then the question is to find another mirror. Thus are men. You do not doubt my love?

SHA. I do not doubt your coquetry, for that is woman's soul, and, therefore, that will last.

OL. Well, glory lasts, and that's for poet's soul.

SHA. Glory is a ripple on the sea of time. It lures me not. But woman is a lure I fain would fly from, for she is ice for slippery feet, and weak fingers feminine can, with loving charm, do worlds of ill, to blundering men. . . .

OL. And blundering men to foolish women. I think you're jealous like myself.

SHA. Olivio, you are April. I was April once.

OL. Fie, poet, you are poetry, and have no age.

SHA. I have an age. It's getting visible.

OL. Well, why do we be sad, when love's for aye.

SHA. I know not why I'm sad, but sad I am without a reason.

OL. Most unreasonably sad.

SHA. And sadness without a reason is sadness still.

OL. Well, we'll be not merry, then, so that we love. Perhaps our love is a little worn.

SHA. Olivio!

OL. A woman never knows, but she divines that love is most unstable. My youth! I gave you that and aught I had, besides. Women are made like that. Perhaps we please you for a little while, like pleasant dreams in the day, that are only pleasant visitants to you. And poets are a thirsty set. They drink too hard at woman's love, and then have had too much. They think of other loves, and long for them. They hold the hands of their Olivios, their hearts are in some other clime.

SHA. Olivio!

OL. Ah, now the masque is off. You thought of other hands.

SHA. I merely thought of my children back in Warwick.

OL. Aye.

(She weeps.)

SHA. I've done you ill.

OL. I'll fain a sorrowful sort of cheerfulness. *(She assumes gaiety.)* Now I'm as merry as a columbine on the hill, in May, or, if not so gay as that, why, somewhat frolicsome, then, I'll be, as a flower in the rain.

SHA. We'll love when columbines are dead.

OL. Ah, yes, of course we'll have a little more of love. Pray, speak of other things. How Essex loves the queen, perchance, or whether he loves her not as much as people think.

SHA. Of course he loves her.

OL. She's getting old.

SHA. Queens are never old.

OL. And you know women.

SHA. Not queens, my love.

OL. Well, queens are only queens. Who comes. If it be Winchester I mustn't see him. I'll stay out here.

(She goes into the gallery.)

SCENE IV.

WINCHESTER, SHAKESPEARE.

WIN. Good-morrow, sir.
 SHA. Rest you merry. Did you send for me?
 WIN. I wished a word with you in private.
 SHA. I'm honored.
 WIN. Did you come alone?
 SHA. Nay. I came with a friend, an actor of the Blackfriar troupe.
 He is waiting in the gallery.
 WIN. Which actor is that?
 SHA. Olivio.
 WIN. A mighty pleasing fellow.
 SHA. Does your lordship know him?
 WIN. He acts in feminine roles. A yes, I know him.
 SHA. He does them well, my lord.
 WIN. I've heard you write with cleverness most unusual and have
 a style.
 SHA. My work is rather bad.
 WIN. Ah, modesty is a virtue unknown to courtiers. I care not over
 much for mummeries of the stage.
 SHA. We think our work important though it is but bad.
 WIN. Plays are for those who need to be amused. I find amusement
 in the court. I have no time for plays.
 SHA. The queen is not like you, my lord.
 WIN. But I am willing to grant my patronage.
 SHA. I'm grateful.
 WIN. Some years ago, I saw your play called Romeo, I think it was.
 It had a little poetry, but I care not for poetry, and can recall no word
 of what I heard. I am too busy to remember plays. The theatre is a
 bother. And say, what sense is there when half a dozen yokels take the
 part of multitudinous battling armies, fighting with rusty foils and
 shields of tin? Ridiculous, Mr. Poet. I'd rather watch fighting real where
 dogs and bears rend one another's hide at Paris Gardens.
 SHA. Bears, dogs, and actors fight to earn their suppers.
 WIN. I leave play-going for the middle-class, the squires, the trades-
 men.
 SHA. Ah!
 WIN. But I've a plan that's promising. I can turn your frivolous
 profession into serious ways.
 SHA. How's that?
 WIN. I'll reveal my plan, so you promise secrecy about this interview.
 SHA. O, I'll do that, of course.
 WIN. It is your function, is it not, to imagine things, foolish fables,
 fantasies, to please the public whim, and plots with little meaning.
 SHA. Too many times they are.
 WIN. And allegories, themes historical?
 SHA. Often, my lord.
 WIN. Well, how would you like to write about the executed lady, Mary
 Stuart?
 SHA. Well, that is delicate, my lord.
 WIN. What way?
 SHA. In several ways. I might present a banished lady in too flattering
 an allure of personality, an eloquent, passionate, damsel, with fascina-
 tions. She might look very like a martyr.
 WIN. The victim of an oppressive cause. Is it that you mean? Well,
 write the play. I'll give a hundred guineas.
 SHA. The price is much too much.
 WIN. Well, here's two hundred, then. That's less. Now here's my
 wish. This Mary Stuart has her sympathisers even now who seek to
 bring calamity upon her judges, and I am one. You must make the charm-
 ing creature a sort of Messalina, capable of every crime.
 SHA. That's asking much, my lord.
 WIN. More than you can grant?
 SHA. Aye.
 WIN. Why?

SHA. Because I am no vampire bard, and your suggestions like me not. My play would be writ another way.

WIN. Oh, since you have such scruples you could show her under the influence of a favorite. She'd be less odious, thus.

SHA. She would, in sooth.

WIN. Make her swayed by someone wicked, say Rizzio, or Bothwell.

SHA. And neath the mask of Rizzio or Bothwell would be seen the face of Essex. Is it that you mean?

WIN. Why not?

SHA. In order that the enemies of the count may use the scandal. 'Twould be a way to show a man who inveigles queens, and helps destroy a kingdom by his dark ambitions. Is it that you want?

WIN. That's it.

SHA. The hidden meaning of the play would be "Death to the favorite." A pleasant allegory.

WIN. Well, write it, then, for now's the time to choose twixt Essex and yourself. And if with Essex you remain, you frolic most capriciously with degradation, poverty, exile, death, for these front the count and all his merry crew, but if you choose to stay with me, fortune will find you out, and favour, too. Your name will be a glory to the realm.

SHA. Ah, infamous proposal!

WIN. Infamous in what? 'Tis a most handsome scheme.

SHA. A scurvy scheme. If Essex were a stranger, 'twould even then be base to make him victim of a satire most unjust, to set upon him like a snake in the grass, and bring a yelping pack of courtiers to the death to finish him, and if he is a friend of mine, as friend he is, the deed of writing satires false against this friend is monstrously impossible. Let's talk of other things.

WIN. But have a care. This may be matter for regret.

SHA. Perhaps, but I cannot write the satire you require.

WIN. Your action makes you seem just like a rebel. Are you that?

SHA. Nay, my lord. I'm a citizen who fashions plays.

WIN. Don't fancy that I treat you as an equal.

SHA. O, never that. The state is most unequal.

(Elizabeth and Essex appear at back, unobserved.)

WIN. Such vanity, the vanity of scribbling wretches. Have writers any use at all, if not to serve the uses of the queen and state?

SHA. Our use is to hold a looking-glass before the state so it can see how it is made, its foolish grimaces, its falsities; we place the shadow of humanity in our weak pages, that poor mortality may laugh or weep when it is cheap or tragically placed by circumstance or human folly. And so we write, if then for nothing else, why, to inspect ourselves. If, then, perchance, we unmask certain poor hypocrisies that lurk within, we seek to drag them forth into the light, where they may be the source of laughter, and, sometimes, too, we find affections that outlast the fiendish stratagems of death, and dire calamity, and then our work is paid. Our inks are tempered with indulgence, too, and oft we close our eyes so not to see a little weakness in a noble soul, and oft we chirp some nonsense to quell the tribulation of a heart that's sore depressed, to win the roses back to pallid cheeks, and make a merry vision of society. But often we are minions of our style, and see things in a sombre way through morbid eyes where pessimism dims the view, and often we see things wrong, and oft see naught at all. But still sing we on, like crickets in the weeds, when all the ways are dark and night is fallen, and no note of ours reaches the ironic stars. It's most gloomy work.

SCENE V.

Same, ELIZABETH, ESSEX, then OLIVIO.

EL. Bravo, sir poet. A discerning speech.

SHA. Thanks, queen.

ES. It makes us courtly folk to be somewhat human as it's somewhat hard to see.

WIN. *(dryly.)* The court is the court, and a yeoman is a yeoman.

ES. *(wickedly.)* And cock-fights are cock-fights, and Winchester's satisfaction.

EL. Essex, your jests will make me have you thrown among the lions.
(*She smiles indulgently.*)

WIN. I don't like plays.

EL. Poor man, the court's absorbed you.

ES. Plays will still be writ in spite of Winchester's disapproval.

EL. Don't wrangle, gentlemen.

ES. I'll shut my mouth.

EL. (*to Shakespeare.*) What provoked your speech?

SHA. We talked of a queen.

EL. What queen?

SHA. We talked of Mary Stuart.

EL. Oh . . . of Mary Stuart. What said you else?

SHA. I must not say.

WIN. You may, for all of me.

SHA. I had an offer to write a play.

EL. About this queen?

SHA. To defame the memory of this queen for sundry guineas.

WIN. I made the offer.

EL. A most unhandsome offer.

WIN. A woman beheaded?

EL. The ax doth kill, and yet means no dishonor. Winchester, you have blundered.

ES. And so think I. A vile demand.

WIN. The world will think as I do on this matter.

ES. I think you sought to justify Elizabeth's severity toward Mary Stuart.

WIN. Perhaps I did. My zeal for service to your majesty.

EL. Misguided zealotry. I'll answer for my acts, and ask no commentators nor condoners. What I do, 'tis I who do it. This Mary Stuart was unfortunate. We'll say no more.

ES. You'd better send those guineas to the families you bereft in Suffolk by your orders. A worthy deed.

EL. Another time. We had some business, Essex, did we not?

ES. Aye, gracious lady.

WIN. I'm at the orders of your majesty.

SHA. I'll take my leave.

EL. Nay, stay. I wish your company to Windsor. We'll talk about the other play we planned.

SHA. I thank your majesty.

EL. And Winchester, you are indiscreetly arduous in my cause. To punish guilty ones is right, but it is meet to be most just to those who suffer by the guilt of others. The fortunes of those folk must be retrieved. (*Essex hands paper to Winchester.*)

ES. And I beg your majesty to note the charge against Sidney, whose execution was ordained this morning. (*He hands her papers.*) The man was libelled and condemned to have his hand cut off for writing trivial pamphlets. On the scaffold he had still one hand left to wave his hat for the queen. Lord Winchester's work, again.

SHA. The foul injustice.

EL. Was it injustice?

SHA. I knew this man. A worthy fellow, as innocent as the day, and much maligned.

WIN. A seditious rascal, insulting your crown.

SHA. He is most loyal.

EL. I pardon him. Have the writ made. (*She walks toward back.*)

WIN. My favour's at low ebb.

ES. 'Twill ebb still lower, else you change your practice.

WIN. I'll change it, then, ere I be beached. But first, I'll make my friend, the poet, happy with this document. (*He hands him papers.*)

SHA. I expected this.

EL. What papers are those?

SHA. My wife's divorce. And letters withheld, written by my children . . . written to me.

WIN. Letters withheld? What's that? Give me them back.

SHA. I'll keep them. They are mine.

EL. Read one.

(*Olivia enters at left and listens.*)

SHA. This letter's from my daughter: "We read your play in secret in the garden. 'Twas about a king, named Lear. Susanna did not understand, and yet she listened, her lips all stained in mulberries from the tree o'erhead. I cried, and read the book, and then she didn't cry, but laid it down without a word, and suddenly laughed, a little brokenly. 'Twas worse to hear, than weeping, and then she went away. Farewell. Your daughter Judith."

EL. Return to Stratford, poet, to see your daughter.

SHA. Thank, gracious lady, I'll go.

OL. And leave Olivia?

EL. Who is this Olivia?

ES. A player of lady's parts in the Blackfriar troupe.

EL. A comely fellow. (*To Olivia.*) Was it you that played at Juliet?

OL. Aye, your majesty.

EL. 'Twas a lovely art you had in a lovely play.

OL. I thank you.

EL. Winchester, we'll go hence. (*Exit queen and Winchester.*)

SHA. Essex, you've met, Olivia. 'Twas in front of the theatre.

OL. I remember.

ES. And so do I. There was something romantic in the incident.

SHA. Yes.

ES. I'm not unfriendly to romance.

SHA. My lord, something calls me to Stratford. And before I go, I ask to leave the thing I prize the most with you. And you must offer your protection to this friend I leave, for she's my life.

ES. You'd better not leave her.

SHA. This I must do, if you'll accept the charge.

ES. Of course I must accept, but. . . .

SHA. Then I'll be gone, e'er agony begins to paralyze my purposes and make me stay. Farewell, Olivia, and farewell, Essex.

(*Exit Shakespeare.*)

OL. He leaves me naught but ashes of his love.

ES. He will come back and bring the fire.

OL. Perhaps he'll come too late, for abysses creep between us when we know it not, and friends grow alien in a summer day.

ES. Alien? How alien?

OL. Why, weeds of hate grow up and all the flowers of love are crowded out. That's what I mean.

ES. Ah, do not grieve at what will turn to joy some other summer day. And you are trembling. Have no fear. You are in the hands of friendly folk.

(*He takes her hand as Elizabeth and Winchester enter.*)

SCENE VI.

ESSEX, OLIVIO, ELIZABETH, WINCHESTER.

EL. (*angrily.*) Again, Essex? This is too much. Tyrone and his rebels have taken the field in Ireland. You'll go thence without delay.

ES. Aye, madam.

EL. At once, you understand.

ES. At once, if such is your will.

(*Exit Essex.*)

EL. (*to Olivia.*) And, lad, you seem to me quite sad and pale and full of tremors. So Shakespeare's gone. Well, that's unfortunate. And Essex will be gone. And that's unfortunate, too. And you and Shakespeare were tremendous friends. (*She takes Olivia's hand and looks sharply at it.*) Tremendous friends, for this sweet hand is rather fine and full of grace. In fact, I think, Olivia, 'tis a woman's hand.

End of Act 3.

ACT. IV.

Tom Hathaway's House at Stratford. At left, a pavilion, with steps. At right, an iron fence with a gate. At back, a court-yard. In right foreground, a stone bench.

SCENE I.

TOM HATHAWAY, DAVY, ANN, JUDITH, SUSANNA, etc.

(Tom and several friends enter at gate.) . . .

TOM. Well, neighbors, I feel assured of Stratford's good support. Winchester sends information that lords Eglamour, Fastidious, and Brisk arrive to-night with full authority to act. Lord Essex must be downed. To-night, gentlemen, at the factory. I will meet you there.

(The crowd file through the gate.)

DAVY. What shall I do, master?

TOM. You, Davy, take a place near by along the road, and tell the nobles where to go to the meeting. But say, my friend, didst thou see a prowling man about the farm?

(Ann is seen listening in pavilion.)

DAVY. No, master.

TOM. Well, keep your musket by. We'll run him to earth like a partridge.

DAVY. Aye, that we will. And we'll not get hanged, either, for poaching.

TOM. And if he tries to enter, I've told you what to do.

DAVY. I'll do it with skill.

(Ann enters.)

ANN. Tom!

TOM. Good evening, sister.

ANN. I heard your evil plans.

TOM. Well, pay no heed, or else, don't eavesdrop.

ANN. Men are most paltry in their enmities.

TOM. How's that?

ANN. I'll fix your schemes, my brother Tom.

TOM. I'm master here. Perhaps you think I have no pity, either.

ANN. A man without pity is never master, for the secret of strength is pity.

TOM. Well, women are surely much too queer for my dense head. They hate and love, and love and hate, and I can make nothing out of it. Beings without mercy, they advise you to be merciful, and if you see no way to be as they wish they threaten.

ANN. Be merciful for Judith, then, if not for me.

TOM. I like him not. He shall stay out of my house.

ANN. He came here just to see his daughters.

TOM. He'll not see them.

(Judith enters with Susanna.)

Here are the brats. Say, Judith, don't come here. We're talking privately. Go into the garden. *(They go.)*

ANN. Poor things. They miss their father.

TOM. And so do I, for I have got his family on my hands.

ANN. But he sends you money.

TOM. And never enough. I'll take the money of this mountebank to save it from the gaming-table. He takes the whim to see his daughters and then desires to open doors we've closed to him. The patronage of Essex cannot make me like this comic writer.

ANN. You have a cruel heart, Tom Hathaway.

TOM. Well, yours is rather soft.

ANN. What is the meeting for, tonight?

TOM. A debt to Winchester. We conspire in the fall of the favorite. If Essex falls, he takes our friend, the poet, with him to perdition. Hence, my enthusiasm.

ANN. You are a vicious enemy, my brother Tom.

TOM. Aye, and a vengeful one. *(He goes out left.)*

ANN. A nest of bandits . . . but I'll be a bandit, too. I'll learn to be an outlaw, since it's the fashion.

(She goes out through the gate.)

SCENE II.

LORDS EGLAMOUR, BRISK, FASTIDIOUS, DAVY.

DAVY. Come in, my lords. Tom Hathaway's gone, I see . . . perhaps he's at the meeting in the town. You're to meet him there at his factory.

EG. This mixing up with tradesmen is absurd. I've got my fill of it already.

FAS. Well, if it helps to rid us of favorite, there's something gained.

EG. And anyway, the expedition has a tang of new adventures, more exciting for us gentlemen than a calendar of courtly exercises.

BR. What is your understanding of this matter, Eglamour?

EG. Thus. That Essex passes here tonight on his way to Ireland. This, you know, by order of the queen, a wonderful caprice. Now, hourly is he due along the Stratford road. With sturdy help from Hathaway's friends, we hope to provoke a brawl.

FAS. Suppose our burgher brethren run like hares, and leave us to be mangled in a mess of wayside briars? What, then, will we do?

EG. Oh, they'll not run. They're formed of stalwart country stuff for fighting, and Hathaway has a grudge, and we will be there, so of course, you can count on a smart affray. What think you, gentlemen?

FAS. Let the fight begin. I am a perfect valiant devil in a scrimmage.

BR. My words are ready, though my legs are weak. Lead on, my lords. *(Exeunt.)*

SCENE III.

SUSANA, SHAKESPEARE, JUDITH.

(A pause . . . then Shakespeare, a wayworn figure, enters the gate and sits on the stone bench. The younger child, Susanna, walks in with her doll in her arms and discovers the man on the bench. The poet is not too lost in sad reflection to see her.)

SHA. Ah, little one, come here. I'll do no harm to thee and thine. *(The child, embarrassed, comes to him. He takes her hand, and strokes her head.)* Where is your mother, child?

SU. My mother's gone.

SHA. Your doll has a pretty dress.

SU. Yes. Judith made it.

SHA. What is the name of your doll?

SU. Cordelia. It's named after a girl on a story. She had lost her father.

SHA. Where did Cordelia live? In Stratford?

SU. No. In a play. *(Judith enters.)*

JU. Father! *(They embrace.)*

SHA. Where's mother?

JU. She was here a while ago.

SHA. Is she well?

JU. Quite well, for grievous times. I'm glad you came.

SHA. We'll visit.

JU. Why can't we stay with you forever? Our uncle is too strict.

SHA. I would you could. 'Tis rather difficult.

JU. My mother is sad.

SHA. Like me. Now that I've seen you, children mine, I'll stay no longer.

(He turns to go, reaches gate, and a shot is heard.)

JU. O!

SHA. Run into the house, my child. There's danger.

(The two children go into house. Shakespeare enters pavilion.)

SCENE IV.

SHAKESPEARE, TOM HATHAWAY, DAVY, LORDS EGLAMOUR,
BRISK, FASTIDIOUS, ANN.

DAVY. He's here, somewhere. I saw him enter.

TOM. We'll find him, then. We'll find the fox. But Essex is coming down the road. *(There is a sound of hooves.)* Ah! now we will deliver England from her favorite. Essex! Death to Essex! Death to the favorite!

(Shakespeare runs to gate, shuts it, and draws sword.)

SHA. Long life to the favorite, Essex.

TOM. The devil! If we can't have him, you'll do as well, for we're looking for you both.

SHA. Begin instructions with your poltroon crew. You'd slay in way-side brawl the noble lord who goes to fight in the queen's cause. A most gallant company. My compliments, worthy gentlemen.

TOM. We'll spit you like a rabbit.

SHA. Come, on, my merry men. I'm rather eager.

TOM. It cannot come too quickly. If Essex gets to Stratford, he'll escape us, and Essex must be caught, or otherwise, we're caught ourselves. Stand aside, our warrior-playwright, or I'll run you through. Who's first?

EG. I'm first, or else Fastidious. He's a handy swordsman. That's it, Fastidious.

FAS. I have a small account with him to settle. But I can wait awhile. Let Brisk begin the fray.

BR. Well, I'll begin when some one else is through.

SHA. A gallant band of ruffians to stop a favorite. Essex, I think, is in no danger.

EG. I'll show you, insolent poetaster.

(Eglamour lunges at Shakespeare, who parries, and begins to fight a fencer's battle of delay merely to gain time.)

EG. *(winded.)* This battle lasts too long. Essex will escape us.

SHA. I'd be a fool to kill you, for after you are dead, I'd be a little tired, and the second-comer would be fresh. So I'll keep you living, and a little tired. It's easier.

TOM. Ah, if that's your game, we'll take a hand, at once, lest Essex get to Stratford, while we wait our return.

(They all rush at Shakespeare, who is borne down by numbers, and wounded. Ann enters.)

EG. I think we reached him, then.

ANN. Will! Poor fellow, are you wounded?

SHA. Not gravely.

ANN. I'll see.

TOM. Follow me, friends. The principal game will escape us. Down with Essex! *(They go out.)*

ANN. Essex is in Stratford, now. Their trip is useless.

SHA. That's grateful news.

ANN. To think of you fighting a favorite's cause, and the favorite is deceiving you.

SHA. How? Isn't Essex my friend?

ANN. Not quite. I just saw Essex pass with sweet Olivio, a lovely comrade at his side to share his march.

SHA. Olivio, with Essex, on the march.

ANN. *(bitterly.)* That makes you sad, but I've been queen of bitterness so long, I know what sadness is.

SHA. I think I'm losing everything that's fine and false. Olivio, Essex, and yourself, I've lost you all.

End of Act IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

(An elegant pavilion in the house of Essex. Doors at back and sides. Round table at left back, with candle-sticks and lighted candles.)

OLIVIO, MAID, then ESSEX.

MAID. It's a wild night, my lady. The shutters rattle most unpleasantly.

OL. Aye, wild, indeed. I found it so.

MAID. Your journey must have been most mad.

OL. It was . . . How I came, I know not.

MAID. *(looking through window.)* The wind wrestles with the beech-trees as though to drag them to other parks.

OL. Shut out the storm, please.

MAID. I'll shut it out, my lady. *(She closes the blinds.)*

OL. For I shall hide in the storm, when I've gained the little breath to take me on to London.

MAID. No, madam, you'll not fare forth again. 'Tis too uncouth to travel roads alone, and the hurricanes threatening all the hills for miles

around. I'll bar the door, with bolts and admonitions. 'Tis not purposeful to ramble on a night like this. I'll never let you go, madam.

OL. Good friend, I cannot stay.

(*Essex enters hurriedly.*)

ES. Olivio.

OL. God rest you, Essex. Why did you come?

ES. Can you ask that? I rode all night it seemed to me, and I'd have ridden weeks to find Olivio. Why did you leave me?

OL. I am as the fire. I burn all persons that come near.

ES. Burn me, then.

OL. Ah, noble friend, I've tripped the happiness of several, and now am tripped, myself.

ES. Where is a world where happiness persists? I know of no such place. And friendship seems a will-o'-the-wisp. I've made it such. And yet I couldn't do aught else, with Olivio's eyes to trick me into rashness.

OL. Well, I have lost two friends, and made you lose still more. I had naught else to lose, except tranquility.

ES. That I never had, nor wanted.

OL. I've showed your friend and mine the way back to his other home, for there he wished to be.

ES. How did you show him that?

OL. By loving you.

ES. You love me?

OL. I tried and failed. And now I've lost you both.

ES. So you loved him, eh? and to think I fancied I was loved.

OL. Some storms love lives through, others it does not.

ES. I've been too treacherous to merit aught save hate.

OL. Love is the world's most tender treachery. It betrays us all.

ES. Yes, it has destroyed Lord Essex.

OL. But, now let's talk of other things. You've disobeyed the queen.

ES. That's not the cause of her spite.

OL. That's why I'm going hence.

ES. Nay.

OL. Yes, I am resolved on that. Your course is with the queen to plead and she will pardon. Myself I'll take to other sports than courtly jeopardies.

ES. What sports?

OL. I'll be once more a mummer as before. For you have foes within the court will do you ill. They'll do you worse if I am there. That's why I go to London.

ES. Stay, Olivio. You fled without farewell for me at Stratford. And now you leave me with a curt good-by.

OL. Well, good-by, then. A long good-by.

ES. What damnable treachery from one so fair.

OL. Speak not of treachery. Love is built of that. We three who once were friends are coated o'er with treachery . . . Our lives are tragically intermingled.

(*A roll of thunder is heard.*)

OL. Was that a door that shut?

ES. Aye. A door of the sky. The storm holds.

(*Another noise without, and sound of parley*)

OL. There's something here besides the storm.

ES. I'll see.

(*He starts to go. The maid enters.*)

MAID. William Shakespeare requests to see lord Essex.

ES. He's welcome. Bid him enter. (*Exit maid.*)

Go in there, Olivio. (*Olivio retires behind curtain Shakespeare enters at back.*)

SCENE II.

SHAKESPEARE, ESSEX

SHA. Essex!

ES. My friend! God rest you!

SHA. (*ironically.*) Ah friend in what? Am I a friend?

ES. If you'll permit, I'll say that I'm your friend.

SHA. Ah, most honorable friend.

ES. Your tongue is coated with a scorn that suits me not, and yet in spite of bitterness of tongues, I am your friend.

SHA. You've cogg'd the dice, Lord Essex. A slippery game 'mongst gentlemen.

ES. I've played as fair as any man, and yet I know your meaning.

SHA. Well, since you know my meaning, what have you to say?

ES. That Olivio has tried to save you from yourself and by sad pretence of love for me, she sought to make you jealous, for your sake, and for the one she could not like, your wife. She made me love her, and it wasn't difficult to do. She loved me not, and that was pitiful for me. Now do you ask my meaning?

SHA. She loved you not, and yet she sought your love. What meaning lurks in such a subterfuge? Your purposes are curious. In fact, I think you're just a man of wax, a wheedling pup, my lord.

ES. That's rather short a phrase. Suppose we see if swords can make it longer.

SHA. We'll try, my lord.

(They draw. Olivio runs between them.)

SCENE III.

Same, and OLIVIO.

OL. I'll be the one to die, if one must die.

SHA. I thought I'd find you here.

OL. If I can speak to straighten out a troubled world, I'll say I gave myself to Essex.

SHA. Of course you did, since so you wished. Why not?

OL. You thought of Stratford folk. I helped you think of them still more.

SHA. That speech is too nimble for my vengeance. Excuse me, Essex.

ES. Certainly.

SHA. And then I found a rival in the queen, and Essex she did send toward Ireland.

ES. I started, and then decided not to go to banishment.

SHA. Well, I can find no name to call Olivio.

ES. What do you call yourself and me?

SHA. Fools . . . Women have made us such.

ES. And yet Olivio sold me out to save your soul.

SHA. She gave herself to you.

OL. Condemn me, then. Ah, I am most unhappy. For when I wish to save, I damn the ones I save, and muddy up the lives of all I love. A harlot you may call me, but I loved, and love is harlotry of noble mien. If there's one more wretched than myself I'd like to see him.

SHA. Well, you will sing again like other desperate birds when the storm has passed. For such is the way with your ilk.

OL. 'Twill be a merry song. I've no song left, I think.

SHA. You were a fair abyss, hidden in flowers. I fell therein.

ES. And so did I, and swords might end what tongues can never settle. Suppose we try.

SHA. I'm ready. I've shed some blood for you already. Now you can have the opportunity to take some more, if you can fence, as I know you can.

ES. When did you shed your blood for me?

SHA. At Stratford, when foes of yours were bent on your destruction.

ES. Excuse me, friend. I think we'll sheathe our swords.

(The maid enters hurriedly.)

MAID. The queen desires to see Lord Essex.

ES. Is the queen here?

SHA. I'll go.

(Exit Shakespeare.)

(Winchester enters.)

ES. Greeting, Winchester.

OL. I think I'll leave you to converse alone.

WIN. Stay, madam.

OL. Oh!

WIN. The queen, my lord.

(Enter Elizabeth.)

SCENE IV.

ESSEX, OLIVIO, ELIZABETH, WINCHESTER.

Es. Welcome, your majesty.
 EL. I come to ask you to explain, my lord.
 Es. I'm ready to explain. What explanation is it that you ask, O gracious lady?
 EL. I sent you forth to Ireland, and you have not gone. That's rather strange.
 Es. I had an urgent reason to return.
 EL. I've heard the reason.
 Es. What have you heard?
 EL. That you signed a treaty of peace with Tyrone. Is that so?
 Es. It is. I did so from diplomacy. To keep from killing needlessly.
 My council . . .
 EL. It is made up of mine enemies. Sir, I am queen, and bid no interruption.
 Es. But I am Essex, madam.
 EL. And you would be more than Essex. Perhaps through agency of James, the Scot, you would dethrone a Tudor queen.
 Es. Well, that is false. I find no more to say than that.
 EL. A paltry hypocrite and liar, thou!
 Es. Madam, I bear no insult, though it be from queens, themselves.
 EL. Then you'll accept the punishment of queens. Essex, I banish you from office, for your insolence.
 Es. I thank you, gracious queen.
 EL. If you are not a traitor, you must kneel to me.
(Essex remains standing.)
 WIN. The queen demands obeissance. Will you kneel?
 Es. I am no slave.
 EL. Beware, thou poltroon Essex.
 Es. I know the germ of your displeasure, 'Tis cause I loved Olivio.
 EL. Devils mar your face. I hate you.
(She slaps him with her glove.)
 Es. Your majesty has made me rebel.
 EL. Winchester, we'll go hence. *(Exit queen.)*
 OL. I'll give myself up.
 Es. No.
 WIN. *(to captain of the guards.)* Arrest him!
 Es. *(shouting.)* Aid for the house of Essex.
(The room fills with guardsmen.)
 Es. Now arrest me, Winchester.
 WIN. I yield to numbers, but you will answer to the Star Chamber for this crime of treason.
(Winchester is seized and led away.)
 Es. Gentlemen, the hour has come to strike. Are you ready?
 ALL. Long live Essex! Long live Essex!

End of Act 5.

ACT VI.

Library of Queen Elizabeth, lighted by lamps, candles, etc. Sombre decorations. Entrance at back closed with draperies of black and gold. At left, a stairway of several steps. At left foreground, an entrance passage-way. At right, a large window and devotional-chair, surmounted by a canopy. At left, a writing-table.

SCENE I.

Winchester, captain of the guard, constable of Tower, ambassador, usher, judges of Star-Chamber, etc.

WIN. My lord of the Star-Chamber, I have just presented to Her Majesty the death-sentence of Robert Essex. We will await the Queen's commands. *(The judges move toward back. To captain of the guard.)* Did William Shakespeare demand audience last night?

CAP. He did, my lord.

WIN. What was his mission?

CAP. To see the queen.

WIN. Was he admitted?
 CAP. No. He was advised immediately of the order forbidding any-one not belonging to the court from entering the palace.
 WIN. What did he answer?
 CAP. Much distressed he went away.
 WIN. Enforce that order rigorously.
 CA. Yes, my lord.
 WIN. (*to constable.*) Is the Tower quite ready to receive distinguished company?
 CON. It is, your highness.
 WIN. If the queen signs, will there be no delay in the execution?
 CON. None.
 WIN. You know, my friend, count Essex had a ring he valued much. He got it from the queen, before he left for Spain. This ring has grave significance. The one who gave it, on its return to the giver grants absolution from any sin. Elizabeth must never get this ring if Essex sends it. For though he's proud as Dover cliff, he'll send the ring to save his neck.
 CON. Your order shall be executed.
 WIN. That's all. (*The constable goes.*)
 AMB. My lord!
 WIN. Are you the emissary from King James requesting us to pardon Essex?
 AMB. Yes, your excellency.
 WIN. Your intervention is of little use. No one is granted leave to see the queen. I think you'd best return to Edinburgh.
 AMB. Excuse me, but . . .
 WIN. The King of Scotland hasn't realized the crime of Essex or he'd never take up his defence. Tell this to your King James, that Essex is a traitor. His sword is against the interest of the queen. He's author of a popular revolt that's serious. His men have brawled in London streets. He made a fortress of his hostelry to fight against the queen. His letters could have compromised your worthy King of Scotland.
 AMB. But I should like an explanation.
 WIN. Fear not, O worthy man. The letters were burned unread. And yet, 'tis vain to ask the rebel's pardon. There is none to give. Now you may go.
 USH. Gentlemen, the queen.

SCENE II.

Same, with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth enters, and reads the document. Her face is tense, and tormented with nervous pallors. Once she decides to sign, then tosses aside the pen.

EL. Is this quite legal?
 WIN. In all respects, your highness.
 EL. Did nothing come from the tower?
 WIN. Nothing, madam.
 EL. No letter? . . . no message of regret . . . no trinket, ring, or other bauble?

WIN. Nothing came.
 EL. Well, let him die. I will not keep him from it. (*She signs the document and gives it to Winchester.*) Now, this is legal.

WIN. Irrevocably legal. To the Tower, gentlemen.
 (*Exit all, save Elizabeth, who walks moodily, a prey to terrible thoughts. Shakespeare appears at the threshold of the secret door. Elizabeth takes a picture of Essex from her bosom, and the world slips out of sight in the abstraction of her look, but returns abruptly as Elizabeth discovers the poet in the doorway.*)

EL. What man are you?
 SHA. Naught but a maker of plays to please your majesty. You know me, madam.
 EL. An audacious playwright.
 SHA. Pardon me, O gracious lady.
 EL. For an informal visit? . . . Well . . .

SHA. Courtesy is nothing now, when all tumbles in ruins, and manners are just a shadow of righteousness. I'm overwrought with trouble, and seek august advice.

EL. Speak, poet . . . I'll advise. . . .

SHA. I come to tell you of the play we thought to make.

EL. That's relief from worldly pain. Let's talk of plays, but mind you talk of plays.

SHA. We'll straighten out the final act, where there's a tangle.

EL. I like not final acts, but what is yours? Where does the setting lie.

SHA. In London Tower.

EL. A bright play for final acts, but a proper place for final acts of queens.

SHA. 'Tis a chill act.

EL. Could you write a comic scene in the Tower? That would convulse the court, and be a princely satire. I sojourned there once myself. What of the plot you have?

SHA. The plot's a little sombre to match the background. A prison without a prisoner is a desolate room. The moody walls all close the darkness in, as though to imprison that for lack of human prey, a sullen silence steals through evil arch-ways, there is a horrible smell of death, phantoms beckon and flies buzz. My scene contains a courtier, the queen's best nobleman.

EL. A proper place for noblemen. It keeps them loyal.

SHA. Mine is most loyal. N'erhas he faltered in the queen's service, for he is no craven courtier, but a brave man, overthrown by foul conspiracy. His frank intentions, being undermined by enemies, he's in the Tower. A cruel disaster.

EL. Yes, the play has an unhappy sound.

SHA. I'll tell you the rest. The courtier has a friend.

EL. A singular courtier to have a friend. I know the plot. The friend doth seek a pardon with a ring. Is that the way it goes, this sprightly comedy?

SHA. Nay, madam.

EL. Well, what about the friend?

SHA. He has no ring nor nothing much save words to beg the mercy of a queen that's great.

EL. Beg mercy at some other court. We never dealt in mercy, here.

SHA. If Essex, dies, O gracious lady, there's one who'll see his death repeated in her dreams and hours of waking. A ghost of fateful pasts when times were not tyrannical will ever float before her eyes, and in a drear moor of conscience she will flounder miserably regretful, a picture of queenly lassitude to chill the soul, a mournful epilogue to final acts.

EL. A treasonable man must die.

SHA. Well, as your will is iron, I'll say no more. I merely ask a stay of execution, until we ferret out the circumstances of his unfealty. He was hard beset by slippery persons who knew his temper, and he had accidents. Both of us he has harmed, and yet is noble. Have clemency, stern queen.

EL. I grant him clemency, if he leaves England.

SHA. Thanks. I'll go at once to stay the execution. A messenger! Some one! a messenger to the Tower! And hasten fit to outstrip death. Essex is pardoned.

(Exit Shakespeare.)

SCENE III.

ELIZABETH, OLIVIO, then SHAKESPEARE.

OL. Gracious lady!

EL. What do you want?

OL. I bring a mute memorial from Essex.

EL. But I've pardoned him.

OL. Well, here's his ring.

EL. Didn't Essex send it?

OL. Nay, he refused to use it save his life. I took it from him after death.

EL. Is Essex dead? My Essex dead?

OL. He is, madam.

EL. Why, then, Olivio, we're naught but two frail women, and somewhat weary with these comedies of state.

OL. We've had suffering . . . It's an unsufferable world, my lady And I'm a little broken with the mummery that we do . . . And poets are odd . . . and sometimes marry . . . We mummers know they do . . . You see I take the roles of women . . . But I'm broken . . . I work at Blackfriars . . . and the stage is dusty . . . What was it I said . . . Ah, that I was broken . . . It's something that concerned a poet, who wrote a play . . . about a woman, Ann . . . no, Olivio . . . She acted women's parts . . . She's gone, I think. . . .

(Shakespeare enters.)

SHA. Olivio!

OL. Did some one call Olivio? Olivio's lost.

SHA. Olivio?

OL. Yes, I'm Olivio. But who are you? *(She touches his hair.)*

SHA. A player at Blackfriars.

OL. Well, I was a player, too . . . I played in women's parts. and once I tried a role that tried my strength . . . 'Twas a story of immortal love, and lovers twain who died . . .

(Olivio dies.)

End of Act 6.





EPILOGUE.

Same scene as in PROLOGUE.

RICHARD PRINDLE is still writing at his play. He pauses from time to time to light his pipe or to meditate. Finally he stops definitively, gathers his papers in a sheaf, and anchors them with a paperweight. He looks at his watch, then settles back in his chair, a little tired, to indulge in a few moments' reverie. In the midst of his reflections, LOUISE PRINDLE enters at right.

LOU. Ah, Dick.

RICH. Why, Louise. Back already? It's hardly ten.

LOU. I know it.

RICH. But the play can't be over.

LOU. It's over for me. I left before it had ended.

RICH. Ah! I thought I knew the soul of woman, but I find I don't. What's the matter?

LOU. I didn't like the play.

RICH. What?

LOU. No. I was in a very ancient frame of mind when I left our room, and I had a whim to preserve it awhile. I thought of you, Dick, back in our dear little room in the Temple, wandering in the past with your present-day manner, and I thought you might get lost. I simply couldn't wait till the play was ended. I got to thinking how much we enjoy ourselves, scapegrace fashion, and so, I excused myself to the Peytons, for no reason at all.

RICH. But what will they think?

LOU. I didn't ask them.

RICH. You left without so much as saying by their leave. Caprice, your name is woman. How did you get home?

LOU. In a bus.

RICH. (*aghast.*) The devil! You don't mean that you came home in a bus?

LOU. I do mean that I came in a bus, and I assure you I enjoyed the trip.

RICH. Alone?

LOU. Oh, I wasn't alone. The bus was packed.

RICH. Nice sort of thing. To think of my wife skylarking through London at ten o'clock in a bus.

LOU. I was in search of the spirit of ancient London. I couldn't find it in an auto, so I took a bus.

RICH. Well, the spirits are thick in buses. The air is full of them. Did you stop at the Mermaid in your adventures?

LOU. Whenever the bus stopped, I stopped. You see, I couldn't get here quick enough.

RICH. Well, take off your things, and sit down, and stay awhile. I have been adventuring, myself. My frolic is in those papers.

LOU. What papers?

RICH. Those papers on the desk.

LOU. Has our realist been writing a romantic play?

RICH. Of course not.

LOU. Well, then, why should I listen?

RICH. Look here. Once upon a time . . .

LOU. Oh, it's a fairy story. All right. (*She settles herself comfortably.*)

RICH. I may as well read what I have written. I will, anyhow, sooner or later. Can you listen?

LOU. Like Ulysses to the sirens. Read, my dearest Dick.

(*Richard swoops up the papers.*)

RICH. (*grandiosely.*) Arise, ye spirits of ancient London.

(*He looks around for approval.*)

LOU. The invocation. Good. What's the title?

RICH. The Spell of the Past. I'll read you the scenario.

(*He begins to read.*)

End of the Epilogue

and of the play.

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